



Part 2: Spotlight on Raymond W. Suarez, Evaluator for the EngAGEMENT Initiative



(Part Two of a series from the October 2006 issue).

Q & A with Raymond.

1. Of what professional accomplishment are you most proud?

I have worked as a professional consultant since founding QMI in 1992. There have been many highs, and gratefully, few lows, in the last fifteen years. I can honestly say I find no greater professional or personal satisfaction than having been a part of the maturation and growth of GIA as a full-time, professionally operated organization serving the interests of older adults in the US.

2. What has been a significant lesson learned during the course of your career?

A significant suggestion offered to me early in my career is that, "the best way to succeed in business, is to stay in business." In other words, if you don't find a way, any way, to survive and prevail through adversity, you never give yourself an opportunity to be successful. I believe that principle applies in business and in life. I've also learned and

believe that one can accomplish nothing of consequence alone—beyond a certain level of complexity you have to have a partner, partners or a team.

3. What do you enjoy most about the career you have chosen?

Consulting as a career is a calling to which few should answer. It's harder than it looks. It requires excellence in one's subject matter expertise, and competence in managing a business. The satisfaction one derives from achieving established goals and objectives, and witnessing the beneficial outcomes for customers and clients, makes the difficulties and risks worthwhile. That, and the wonderful relationships made along the way.

4. What advice would you offer to any prospective entrepreneurs among us?

The key to business is satisfying a want, need or desire at a cost that is less than enough customers are willing to pay. Know what benefit you are providing, or what prob-

lem you are solving, and be ready to sell it. Every thing else will follow.

Questions pertaining specifically to the EngAGEMENT Initiative:

1. What is the role of an evaluator for the EngAGEMENT Initiative?

As a pilot project, the primary roles of evaluation for the EngAGEMENT Initiative have been, (a) to augment and assist in program formation and implementation, (b) to support knowledge transfer and lessons learned that further program objectives during operation, and (c) to capture and assess quantitative and qualitative outcomes that add to knowledge and understanding in the field and that support dissemination and expansion of the program, its goals, and objectives.

2. How will you evaluate the program?

We will collect qualitative and quantitative data using simple, straightforward means designed to be user-friendly based on feedback from program participants. Data collected will be organized using a dash-board of indicators that map against

the logic model for the program. The program logic model is driven by

the goals and objective of (a) the Initiative's funder, Atlantic Philanthropies, (b) GIA's stated goals and objectives as grantee and program organizer, and (c) the unique goals and objectives of each regional association selected to participate.

3. Will you be making site visits to gather information for evaluation?

Either I or Pamela Tyler, the National Outreach Director, will endeavor to visit each participating regional site between the time of the GIA Annual Conference and the end of the current grant period in June 2007. Our visits will be designed to collect both standard participation data to the degree that it exists, along with narratives, examples, case studies, etc., that help exemplify and illuminate ways in which the EngAGEMENT Initiative has helped participating Regional Associations raise awareness, educate and elicit participation by foundations and other grant-

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but from
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responsibility.”*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
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Milwaukee was the site of the 2006 Annual GIA Conference—and what a wonderful place it was to convene for a discussion on aging! The spectacular historic Pfister Hotel—which is aging in place quite nicely—was a hub of activity for conference guests, attendees/members, and GIA staff over the course of several days in late October.



This year's conference was launched for the EngAGEMENT Initiative team as they gathered for a pre-conference session on Wednesday, October 25. The meeting offered an opportunity for representatives from the six participating regional associations and GIA to meet one another (many for the first time) for a discussion on their progress. Each attendee presented information about current and upcoming EngAGEMENT-related projects. Raymond Suarez then outlined future plans for evaluation. At lunch, the group was joined by Laura Robbins from The Atlantic Philanthropies, funder of the EngAGEMENT Initiative. Laura was impressed with what has been accomplished by the team to date and expressed optimism regarding the future of the EngAGEMENT project.

The conference continued with a variety of worthwhile sessions and noteworthy guest speakers, all well received by attendees. Appreciation is extended to the donors, conference committee members, Milwaukee hosts, and a very diligent Darla Minnich, GIA conference program director, for a memorable event.

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4. In previous conversations, you have mentioned sustainability.

What does that concept mean to you in relation to EngAGEMENT?

- Sustainability in the context of the EngAGEMENT Initiative refers to both,
- the continuation of aging outreach and education activities aimed at foundations and other grantmakers in participating communities, cities and regions, and
 - to the expansion of such activities beyond the scope of the current Initiative to include independent efforts in existing participating regions, and new initiatives inspired by the lessons of EngAGEMENT in other regions.

5. What do you foresee in the future—in other words, what happens AFTER EngAGEMENT?

It is our fervent hope and aspiration that the good work and lessons learned generated by our six pioneering Regional Association participants will result in demonstrable outcomes that in turn encourage support for a continuation and expansion of the EngAGEMENT concept and program in 2008 and beyond.

The EngAGEMENT Initiative, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, is a pilot program to introduce new funders to aging through a partnership between GIA and Regional Associations of Grantmakers

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